

## Indian and White Teachers for Indian Schools

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The second volume of the "Survey on Contemporary Indians of Canada, edited by Hawthorne is revealing; it shows that Indian education in Canada is almost a failure. "In a twelve (12) year span, out of 8782 students, 8441 did not complete high school, this means a wastage of 94% of the school age population. True, this figure is for the years 1951 to 1962, but the trend did not seem to be changing in the years 1964-1965" (Tremblay et al 1967:121).

When the latest census comes out, we may see a change, but I doubt that the situation will be very different. Seeing such a high percentage of failures, we do not have to question ourselves long to realize that it is not the Indian children that fail in school, but rather the school that fails the Indian children.

The school system, what it is, and what it represents, is not suited to the needs of the Indian children. The whole policy of Indian education has to be re-evaluated and re-thought. Granted that educational opportunities for Indians have greatly increased in the last few years, the progress at the institutional level has been remarkable, but the problem in Indian education is at the individual level, in the sense that an Indian child has tremendous difficulties adapting to school. "Si les disponibilités scolaires se sont accrues et si les programmes scolaires offerts aux Indiens se sont multipliés, on ne peut pas prétendre qu'il y ait eu chez les Indiens de progrès correspondants dans le niveau de scolarité atteint et dans la persévérance scolaire. Il faudra chercher à

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comprendre le décalage qui existe entre les progrès institutionnels et les progrès individuels. C'est au niveau de la perception indigène de la scolarisation, à celui des motivations scolaires et des aptitudes d'adaptation des individus dans le contexte scolaire qu'il faut chercher les facteurs susceptibles d'expliquer les insuccès partiels de l'action dirigée du gouvernement auprès des communautés indiennes" (Tremblay et al 1967:162).

We all agree that changes have to be made, and in my opinion these changes should have a direct influence on the concerned individuals, namely the pupils and I am convinced that the change that would affect most the pupils would be a change that would produce a different type of interaction between pupils and teachers. Therefore I suggest that the teacher hiring policy be re-evaluated.

As we have already seen in previous chapters, school is an alienating experience for an Indian child, I believe that an increase in the number of Indian teachers may be a solution to make school more culturally relevant and meaningful. In this chapter I will speculate on the changes that could be brought about in Indian education if Indian teachers became the rule rather than the exception.

#### A. Pre-school and First Half of Primary School

In a later chapter I will deal with the aspect of pre-school education; for now I only want to convey the message that Indian teachers are necessary for the younger children. As Sindell says, "Before starting school these children live in a world which is almost wholly Cree in character. The medium of communication in the family is Cree and pre-school children have little direct interaction with Euro-Canadians, or "Whites". For the small Cree child the most





striking figure in the White world is probably the wabinkiyu, a form of bogeyman who is thought of as White. When children misbehave parents frequently tell their children that wabinkiyu is going to take them away" (1968:83). We see that right from the onset of their lives Cree children have been taught to fear the white man; for the younger children, just going to school can be a scary experience, also considering that the child is removed from the protective shelter of his extended family and left alone to face the unknown, we see that his adaptation to the school milieu must be quite difficult; and then when he meets his white teacher, especially if the teacher is male and authoritarian, and upon finding out that he has difficulty in communicating with him because of language differences, the child will most certainly suffer from emotional insecurity and anxiety, consequently his academic progress will be hindered and his personal adjustment to the school milieu still more difficult.

However, if the pre-school child had an Indian female teacher (surrogate mother) his possibilities for a good adaptation to the school milieu could be greatly increased. This woman he would know well and he would be able to communicate with her in his own language. For the first few years of primary school, that is when the child is a bit older, the teacher should be Indian but not necessarily female, in fact it would be preferable if both sexes were represented in the teaching staff for they could become models for pupils of both sexes.

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attending school in the white world is probably the white world.



## B. Second Half of Primary School

Notwithstanding the language issue for the first few years of primary school, Indian teachers are absolutely required as models for Indian children, the lack of models to which they can identify is particularly destructive to the children's educational endeavours. The discrepancy between children's aspirations and realizations is very revealing; when children were asked, "What would you like to do when you grow up?", the answer showed an interest in high prestige occupations. But when asked, "What will you do when you grow up?", the answer showed low prestige occupations, i.e. Indian type jobs. Upon being questioned on the reason for the discrepancy, the children said that they would like to have high prestige occupations, but that all the Indians they knew had low prestige occupations (Tremblay et al 1967:114, CWC 1967:114). This lack of "successful" Indian models is a strong detrimental influence on the educational incentive of Indian children, and it also leads them to severe identity conflicts since it causes them to adopt white models and reject their own identity which as we have seen creates psycho-pathological disorders (Wintrob and Sindell 1968:94). Since the stimulation of pride in one's culture and identity is an essential ingredient required in Indian education, and knowing that "white teachers can only transmit elements of white culture" (Hawthorne et al 1960:312) we realize that to foster this pride we need Indian teachers.

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Investigating the language issues for the first few years of primary school, Indian teachers are absolutely required as models for Indian children, the lack of models to which they can identify is particularly detrimental to the children's educational endeavours. The discrepancy between children's aspirations and realisation is very revealing: when children were asked, "What would you like to do when you grow up?", the answer showed an interest in high prestige occupations. But when asked, "What will you do when you grow up?", the answer showed low prestige occupations, i.e. Indian type jobs. Upon being questioned as the reason for the discrepancy, the children said that they would like to have high prestige occupations, but that all the Indians they knew had low prestige occupations (Kendall et al 1967:114, GNC 1967:114). This lack of "role models" (Indian models) is a strong detrimental influence on the educational attainment of Indian children, and it also leads them to become identity conflicts since it causes them to adopt white models and reject their own identity which as we have seen causes psycho-pathological disorders (Kendall and Kendall 1963:94). Since the attainment of pride in one's culture and identity is an essential ingredient required in Indian education, and knowing that "white teachers can only transmit elements of white culture" (Kendall et al 1967:112) we realise that to foster this pride we need Indian teachers.

However, in the second half of their elementary school, it would also be a good thing for children to be in contact with white teachers especially because upon graduation from primary school they



will most probably be attending an integrated high school where the majority of teachers will be white, and I believe that having known white teachers at the Indian school will facilitate their adaptation to the white integrated high school. I am convinced that for the Indian children, seeing whites and Indians working together as colleagues can only be beneficial.

C. Qualifications for white teachers

Even though I think that being in contact with white teachers in the last few years of primary school can facilitate the adaptation to integrated high school by permitting children to synthesize elements of both cultures sooner, I am very demanding as to the calibre of the white teachers.

It seems that in general white teachers know nothing about Indian culture (King 1967, Wolcott 1967). Therefore it is only normal that his inherent value as an educator will be considerably reduced in a cross-cultural setting since the white teacher is often in a state of culture shock due to his lack of cross-cultural knowledge. This white teacher may have psychological adjustment problems due to isolation. "Barriers of communication, lack of compatibility, various differences, keep many teachers in isolation in the teacherage. This isolation, unnatural and wearing for the teachers, also deprives the parents of a contact which might aid in enlisting their understanding and support of the school" (Hawthorne et al 1960). This isolation leads to anxiety "the longer a teacher remains surrounded by but socially isolated from the Indians on a person to person basis, the less he is able to realistically appraise





their behaviour. This leads to an anxiety-based fantasy assessment of the Indians which often leads to a manifest fear reaction. The higher the anxiety level and the greater the fantasy content in his perception of the Indians, the more distorted his interpersonal relations with them will be. Thus the anxiety-fantasy reaction tends to be perpetuated" (Rohner 1965:337). Needless to say that these psychological problems will render him inefficient as a teacher (King 1967, Hawthorne et al 1960, Rohner 1965).

Fortunately, this type of problem is now being overcome through better training programmes for teachers who will teach in a cross-cultural setting. They are now being taught anthropology, cross-cultural education methodology, sociology etc. I realize that an effort is being made to increase the qualifications of the cross-cultural educators, but this effort should go as far as hiring only teachers with such training and even of progressively phasing out those who are not properly trained for their jobs.

I recognize the fact that there is probably not a large enough number of white teachers qualified enough for this type of cross-cultural education, and that to accommodate all Indian children teachers without cross-cultural training must still be hired. To this I would say lower the standards for Indian teachers, for after all they are not in a cross cultural setting; through this statement I endorse Sindell's recommendation, "Recruiting more Indian personnel without an overemphasis on certification requirements (an Indian teacher who has had grade twelve or thirteen education is a much more effective teacher of Indian children than a non-Indian who has had





teacher's college training)" (Issue No.5 February 4, 1970, pp 5:13-14).

D. Integrated provincial high schools and the teaching staff

While attending integrated high school the Indian children will probably be living in hostels near the schools. For reasons of better psychological adjustment of the children, it is important that these hostels be staffed by both Indian and white supervisors, the latter for the purpose of facilitating the children's synthesis of both Indian and white worlds. But at the schools, however, most teachers will be white, here I believe that it should not be required of the teachers to have had a specific training in cross-cultural education for most of their pupils will be white children; but to keep the proper perspective on Indian children's identity, the teaching staff at the school could include Indian teachers of the same qualifications as the white teachers, and teaching indiscriminately to both white and Indian children. The curriculum should also include provisions for children of both groups to learn about the other culture (the chapter on curriculum will be dealing with this subject more adequately).

Hiring Indian teachers is a good beginning, but it must also be accompanied by an increased participation of the Indians in the education of their children. Basically it means that Indian education must become an Indian affair (in a later chapter I will be dealing with the Indians' participation in their education).

I admit that the policy of hiring Indian teachers may create new kinds of problems, in the sense that it may bring about





factionalism, some teachers may become culture brokers, etc., but even though it could bring new administrative problems for the IAB it still would be a healthy sociological sign, for even an inadequate participation is better than no participation at all, for participation no matter how unskilled or how disorganized it is, almost inevitably leads to self-determination. Therefore it must be encouraged and fostered.

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factiousness, some business may become confused, etc., but even though it could bring out administrative problems for the IAS it still would be a healthy psychological sign. For even as individuals participate in better than no participation at all, the participation no longer has meaning or has deteriorated it is, almost inevitably leads to self-determination. Therefore it must be encouraged and fostered.

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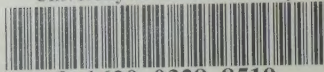
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